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"THE CHINA TRADE"

A play in three acts

by

Margaret Georgia Fawcett

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Straight Wharf Theatre
Nantucket Island, Mass.

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CHARACTERS

(In order of their appearance)

Dorcas Burnell

Patience Burnell (her mother)

James Folger (a boy)

Miriam Joy (a neighbor)

Captain Adam Burnell (Dorcas's father)

Luther Chase (a seaman)

Daniel Swaine (a seaman)

Abigail Macy (a neighbor)

Nathaniel Gardner

Reuben Joy

Feng Tse An (A Mandarin)

Elder Paddock

Mary T. Starbuck (A school girl)

Mary S. Starbuck (A school girl)

Lydia Coleman (A school girl)

Chen San (An Emissary)

Feng Tan (Chinese Envoy to the U.S.)

THE CHINA TRADE

ACT I

When curtain rises Dorcas Burnell, a girl of seventeen, is at window, Down Left, washing the small panes.

(Dorcas - her mind not on her window-washing, crosses back to hallway and peers up the stairs. She comes back into room and resumes her work at the window)

(The room is in disorder, showing that the floors have been cleaned but the furniture not yet dusted, and the brass candle-sticks, not yet replaced on mantle, still stand on table with polishing cloth nearby)

(After another pause Patience Burnell comes down the stairs quickly and enters room, she wears a cape over her gray dress, and carries a telescope, which she places on mantle-piece, as she crosses the room and goes through door, Right, talking to Dorcas as she goes) -

(Both Dorcas and Patience wear the Quaker dress - gray or brown with the muslin bonnet and fichu and apron.)

"THE CHINA TRADE."

ACT I.

PATIENCE

(Comes down stairs, hurriedly taking off cloak.) Thee is right, Dorcas. It is thy father's vessel. She is in the harbor already. So close I could spy the men walking on the deck - (Puts spy-glass on mantel-piece)

DORCAS

Father home!

PATIENCE

Dorcas - as I came down from the roof-walk I could see thee had not washed down the attic stairs. I have to speak of this each Spring and Fall. It is time thee should mend thy ways and keep thy mind on thy work.
(Patience goes Right, hangs up cloak - brings back rugs)

DORCAS

I am sorry, mother.

PATIENCE

Sorry will not wash the stairs - go see to it at once.
(Patience is laying the rugs during next few speeches)

DORCAS

But Mother - with Father's vessel almost in the harbor?

PATIENCE

(Remembering) Thy father - to be sure - Three years voyage and he comes ashore in the midst of Spring cleaning. Well, see to this room first then.

DORCAS

Yes, mother.

PATIENCE

The neighbors will flock in here putting it in a mux-Just as we

PATIENCE

(Drawing herself up.) Thee knows thee may not! When did the self-respecting wife or daughter of a Nantucket whaler ever take part in the public welcome of a returned vessel. It is in his home that the master of a ship is received; thee knows that. Now tie the curtains back and see thee does it properly -

DORCAS

(Going to window) I wonder what gifts he will bring us this time?

PATIENCE

None of that heathen folderol from China, I trust.

DORCAS

Father couldn't refuse gifts from his great friend Feng Tse~~An~~. Shall I get them out of the chest again, now?

PATIENCE

I see no good reason.

DORCAS

But wouldn't Father be angry if he didn't find them here in the room where he had left them?

PATIENCE

Very well, I suppose thee must. But they have no useful purpose and it is contrary to the laws of the Meeting. If the Elders see them they will talk.

DORCAS

(at chest carefully unwrapping large Chinese vase) How could they not be glad to see anything so lovely? Look, mother-- look at its color--its ~~de~~sign- Oh, I had forgotten- I had forgotten there could be so much beauty in one small object.

PATIENCE

Thee talks of beauty, child, as if it had a purpose.

DORCAS

(Looks at her mother as she unwraps more treasures.) But why couldn't we have more beauty in the things that have a purpose? (More or less to herself as she handles treasures.) To think of living where there would be so much color! Someday I'm to see it. On his next voyage Father will take me. He has promised he would.

PATIENCE

Such a promise he makes to hear his own tongue. How could thee make a voyage alone with no other female on a rough vessel around the Horn? Thee is daft, child, if thee has taken thy father's promises to heart.

DORCAS

But I am grown, now. Thee said I could not go before because I was too little and could not take care of myself. But now---

PATIENCE

But now thee is old enough to know better than to imagine thee could go at all. Hand me that dust cloth, Dorcas, and leave off thy dreaming. We must flax.

(Dorcas has been arranging vases and other Chinese objects on mantelpiece)

DORCAS

Yes, mother, we must, I know. I am sorry I forgot to hurry. (She takes another look at vase.) (~~Idea~~) But, mother, shouldn't I go to the store? Have we enough provisions for Father's home coming?

PATIENCE

Certainly. He can share what we have. We have been on short rations this six months with your father off at sea months longer than he planned. But he will go to those Chinese ports each time! We can be getting nothing extra until we learn what sort of a voyage he has had. It may be that he returns with an empty hold.

DORCAS

Not father! Why he's the best Master and owns the finest whaleship out of Nantucket Harbour! (showing her excitement) Oh, mother, I shall put on my new gown that I wear to Meeting to let Father see how grown up I am now.

PATIENCE

I don't see that it's necessary. He will see thee in thy gown on First Day. Change thy apron and cap if thee wishes. That should be sufficient.

DORCAS

Yes, mother. (Starts off.)

PATIENCE

We must continue straightening the house until sun-down. There is no telling when thy father will arrive. He may stop anywhere on his way up Main Street.

DORCAS

(As she goes) I hope he doesn't. The house will seem so happy again with Father about it, whistling. (Exit Dorcas upstairs)

PATIENCE

(To herself.) And blaspheming! If he had but stayed from the sea and become an elder as he promised me, how different

things would be! (She is putting on her apron. She crosses to fireplace and picks up chinese vase and turns it about as if to try to find out what Dorcas thought so beautiful. Continues to herself.) But no- he must set off for foreign parts-- to see strange sights and bring back such things as these to put poison in my child's mind.

MIRIAM

(Knock) May I come in?

PATIENCE

Come in - Come in Friend Joy.

(Miriam Joy enters with shawl about her shoulders, carrying covered pan)

MIRIAM

Thee has heard of course.

PATIENCE

Yes, we've heard.

MIRIAM

Thee must surely be in a mux to get ready to receive thy good man. I baked early today so I came right over with a pan of "hearts and rounds" as soon as I heard. Most men have a sweet tooth.

PATIENCE

Thank thee. (takes^{ing} pan to kitchen) With the fog so thick the vessel was not sighted off shore, so I had no time to bake.

MIRIAM

After three years, My, my but thy feelings must be all of a flutter.

PATIENCE

(Going on with her dusting) To be sure-

MIRIAM

It's true, though, when one has become accustomed to having no man in the house, it's not easy to have one about again- with their smoking and their uncertain hours!

PATIENCE

It is the Lord's will.

MIRIAM

But there are times, when I come home from keeping shop, I'd like to find William Joy again sitting by the stove, with his pipe. Though it did muckle me a good deal when he dropped ashes on the floor instead of in the hod. To be sure, he was a quiet man.

PATIENCE

All men can not be the quiet kind-

MIRIAM

Yes "and the good die young" as the saying goes. Oh! I don't mean anything against thy husband, Friend Burnell and of course many another Master of a whaleship prefers to carouse when he's ashore instead of attending meeting.-

PATIENCE

Too long at sea brings out the worst in a man. Men are all alike at heart.

MIRIAM

No doubt- no doubt- and, as I say, 'Tis better to have a rough one than none at all- as I well know, these many years tending shop and bringing up my boy by myself. Still Reuben has turned out to be a great comfort to me, now that he has settled down and has put all notions of becoming a whaleman out of his mind.

PATIENCE

Thee should be grateful indeed to have thy boy, and to be able to keep him by thee.

MIRIAM

I know what thee is thinking - and I feel for thee. Thy boy would have been grown by now too.- But thee has Dorcas-

PATIENCE

Yes, I have Dorcas.-

(Miriam continues to rattle on)

MIRIAM

She tells everyone she is going to sail on her father's vessel. But, of course it is just a notion. There, you've got out all those foriegn things again.- I presume likely the Captain does feel more at home with foreign things about him, he spends so much time over there, but they must make a lot more work with the dusting.- By the way- Friend Burnell-- does thee think the Captain will bring back any of that Chinese Tea?-- If he does and wants to make a trade with me at the shop I'd be agreeable.- I'd like to have it before any of the other shop keepers.- The town is low on tea. You'll ask him for me Won't you?- I'll pay cash, of course if necessary- but we could make a good trade- now there's the bolt of cloth Dorcas was looking at -

PATIENCE

Yes, yes-

DORCAS

(From upstairs) He's coming- Fathers coming!

MIRIAM

There I'll not tarry - thee'll want thy man to thyself - at least at first - But don't forget to ask the Captain about the tea.

PATIENCE

I'll remember. Good day, thank thee.

(Patience has gone to door - she now goes to window to look out) (Dorcas comes down stairs quickly)

DORCAS

I just saw him turn the corner-- at the Barney house. Two of the crew are with him carrying great boxes. I think one of the men is Daniel Swain and the other Luther Folger, but I couldn't be sure. I never was so excited!

PATIENCE

It would be unseemly for anyone to see thee in such a state, Dorcas. Remember the rules for the conduct of a young lady thee has been taught by the Overseers, if thee can not feel in thy heart what becomes thee.

DORCAS

(Holding herself in.) Yes, mother.

(Captain Burnell's voice is heard outside.)

BURNELL

House ahoy! House ahoy! Wife! Where is thee and our child? Patience Burnell - here be your wandering but rightful husband.

(Dorcas had started for the door-- Patience has restrained her-- Now the door is thrown open and Captain Adam Burnell comes into sight in the doorway. There is a silence as he stands looking from his wife to his daughter and about the room)

BURNELL

(As he crosses to Patience.) Well, Patience, how is thee? Thee looks to have fared well. (He embraces her and puts a kiss on her forehead.)

PATIENCE

Captain Burnell, I am in good health and grateful for thy safe return. (He again looks at his daughter and she runs into his arms.)

BURNELL

My little one!

DORCAS

Oh, father, my heart is so full I dare not speak!

BURNELL

How thee has grown, child! A young lady, as I had expected. With a trim a top-s'll as any sailor lad could ask! Good enough! And thee has been a good girl, I'll wager, and done thy mother's bidding!

PATIENCE

Thee need not start thy wagering, Captain. The child has grown into obedience and respect for her elders and has not neglected her duties more than most of her age.

BURNELL

Good! Good! Consarn it-- the men and my duffle! Left waiting outside! This will never do! They will want to see their families as well. (Calls out) Come aboard, men! I'll not keep you from your own hearths. Just put the lot of it here-- anywhere--but handle that big one carefully-- not like you were

shoving a barrel of oil about the deck. That's it. That'll about do it.

(Luther and Daniel have brought in sea-chest and dunnage bag. Second time they bring large flat object wrapped in burlap)

LUTHER AND DANIEL

aye, sir.

BURNELL

Mrs. Burnell-- you know these two-- Tom Folger's eldest, Luther. And this is the Swain boy--name's Daniel. Both good seamen.

LUTHER AND DANIEL

How de do, Friend Burnell. How's thee?

PATIENCE

Welcome home to thee, Luther and to thee Daniel. Your mothers will glad to see you grown to manhood.

BURNELL

And here's my Dorcas. You three must have played up and down these cobblestones together.

DORCAS

(Going to them) Luther, I didn't know thee at first. Daniel, you won't pull my pigtail now because I don't have one!

DANIEL

Now Dorcas, that's not a thing to throw up to a man-- been gone these three years and never a letter to the Pacific during all that time.

LUTHER

Yes, Dorcas, you didn't remember any of your school-mates so far away.

DANIEL

I'll wager she's got no time to think of us and them Whales in the Pacific with all the stay-at homes here in the Atlantic.
(They laugh loudly.)

BURNELL

All right, men, you'll see Dorcas again. You'd best be getting to your homes now. Here's for a little extra grog. Only don't tell them at Meeting.

LUTHER

(Lumbering out quickly.) Thank you, Sir. Good bye, Friend Burnell.

DANIEL

See you sometime soon, Dorcas. Good bye.

DORCAS

Goodbye, Daniel. Bye Luther. (They exit)

BURNELL

(Exuberantly, sitting with arm about Dorcas.) And now, let's have all the news. How have you two fared? What's gone on in the town? Who's married whom? Who ought to have married whom and who didn't?

DORCAS

Father!

PATIENCE

(Pretending to ignore his remark, gazing at the largest crate.) What might that contraption be? We have no more room in this house for anything so huge.

BURNELL

That, my good Patience, is my most cherished possession. Next to my wife and child I value that contraption, as you call it,

more than anything else I own. It was given me by one whose kindness, I can never repay, whose cordiality, whose friendship, I can never forget! We have pledged our everlasting loyalty to one another and to the families of each other for generations.

PATIENCE

And whom are you talking of?

BURNELL

It is Feng Tse An.

PATIENCE

That Chinaman!-- I thought so.

BURNELL

Feng Tse An is a Cantonese gentleman of the Chinese race. He's the Merchant Prince, whose house I have traded with on every voyage I have made around the Horn. It's he and his family who have sent you these handsome gifts in the past. These valuable porcelain^s that would bring a high price in any market the world over.

PATIENCE

Yes, yes, but what of that? What can it be that's so large?

BURNELL

That is a portrait, the portrait of Feng Tse An himself.

PATIENCE

A picture? that?

BURNELL

It is his very likeness. He engaged the best artist in Canton to paint both our portraits. Imagine your old father, Dorcas, sitting still long enough to have his picture painted. But I had to, By gad, nothing must do but I must be painted also.

Yes, and that picture of me was hanging in his home before I left those shores. And he presented this of himself, to me, and it is his wish and mine, that it hang on these walls as long as I live and afterwards. For it shall haunt anyone who dares to remove it. I have pledged my word. It would be to the dishonour of our family if his wish were not carried out.

PATIENCE

(Incredulous.) A huge picture like that, of a Chinaman, hanging on our wall?

BURNELL

Yes, Patience. I don't make many demands around our home. Whether at sea or ashore I let you run things pretty much as you like. But this one wish is a command, and I expect to have no argument about it.

PATIENCE

Very well, since it is thy wish, so must it be. But thee will have to make thy peace with the Elders, thyself.

BURNELL

So be it. I would like to see the Elders try to tell me how to run my vessel at sea. Tis the same at shore. Besides, what can they say to me? Didn't they read me out of Meeting ~~this~~ ^{three} years past?

PATIENCE

And for me it was the saddest day I ever had to endure.

BURNELL

(Patting her.) Don't get in the mollygrumps, Patience. If some of us weren't to go to hell heaven would be over crowded.

DORCAS

(Runs to picture) Father, do unpack the picture. I want so

much to see it.

BURNELL

All in good time. It will have to be done carefully.

DORCAS

Did Feng Tse An and his little boy like the presents I sent them?

BURNELL

To be sure. They went on about them at a great rate. Now the little boy is a grown man and has sent you this chest-- full of every kind of thing imaginable all for my little "Looi - Ong" who is now a grown young woman.

DORCAS

(Dancing about.) Oh, father-- let me see them right away!

BURNELL

(Takes her chin in hand) First tell me-- how many of these Nantucket dandies are you walking out with, young lady? Who has asked you to stand-up-in-meeting? Thee is not yet hooked in, I trust?

DORCAS

(Turning away, blushing but not shy.) Oh no, father, of course not!

BURNELL

Thee would not fib about it? Is this the truth, wife?

PATIENCE

And well it is. The child is too young yet for such matters.

BURNELL

Maybe-- but she is no longer a child, that any man can see.

DORCAS

Father-- I have no wish for a part in such matters. I am to go to sea with thee-- thee promised I should the next voyage. I'd rather do that than walk out with any young man in Nantucket! I want to feel the wind as the "Falcon" rounds the Horn. I want to sail and sail as if it might be forever, across the great Pacific, and then, someday come to that coast where all is strange and bright. I want to see Canton and all the sights you've told me of-- The wide Pearl River with the sampans on it,-- the narrow Chinese streets with the coolies in their big hats; the Manadarins with their embroidered robes-- Oh, I will, won't I -- someday-- won't I?

BURNELL

(Turns away after catching Patience's eye.) We'll see, we'll see. But first thee must open the chest--thee must see thy presents, Dorcas.

DORCAS

Oh yes, yes, please!

BURNELL

It will tax thee to keep an evel keel when thee spies what's inside. (Dorcas opens chest and stands gazing inside. Patience has seated herself and taken up her knitting. Burnell stands watching Dorcas.)

PATIENCE

Thee and thy heathen companions will turn her head, if I mistay not.

DORCAS

Oh-Oh, such pretty boxes and all this golden paper. (She picks

out a box and opens it.) Jewels -- jewels for me! You never told them I wouldn't be allowed to wear them? But I can look at them and take the lovely coral and jade pieces and hold them in my hand. See mother, how beautiful!

(She runs quickly to Patience who looks and says nothing. Dorcas goes quickly back to chest, taking out another box.) And what is this, father? For the head--oh, do they really wear anything as pretty as that?

BURNELL

Yes, for festivals, and such like.

DORCAS

(Taking out long robe.) And what can this be, embroidered all over? Why it's a robe, a lovely robe!

PATIENCE

A sinful waste, I should think, to put all that work on something to hang on the back.

BURNELL

'Tis the robe sent to a Chinese bride.

DORCAS

(Enraptured with robe has heard no one.) Oh, I must put it on. This one time. Mayn't I? Mother?

PATIENCE

But thee must remember the reading of the Discipline, Dorcas, the "bright things of this world are of short duration."

DORCAS

Yes, mother. (Starry eyed, runs out clutching robe and two boxes.) (Burnell sits)

PATIENCE

There must be no more of this talk of the East. She daydreams

constantly of those far away places. No good will come of it. But first tell me of thy voyage. What of thy lay? It should be good after three years.

BURNELL

Not so bad; not so bad.

PATIENCE

Not so bad tells me as little as if thee had told me nothing at all. We have been on short rations, Dorcas and I, since the 1st month of this year. It would be good to hear thee had done well, Adam.

BURNELL

And why, consarn it, have you and Dorcas not had enough to eat for six months, I'd like to know, when I told thee I had arranged for thee to borrow at the bank if I should be gone over two years?

PATIENCE

I take no delight in borrowing from anyone, much less from a bank. I value my credit too much-- and it is too great a risk. Thee might return with not enough to pay back such money as had been borrowed, and it is always possible that thee might not return at all.

BURNELL

Well, I did, consarn it! And thee need pinch and scrape no longer. My lay was 1000 barrels, not so damn bad-- as I told thee.

PATIENCE

It would sound better to me if thee did not swear about it so idly. In the past thee has done better, and been gone for a shorter time. Could it not be the time thee spends cruising

those China waters and consorting with Chinamen could be spent to better advantage?

BURNELL

It might be. But I have not found it so. I told thee my lay came to 1000 barrels but thee has not given me time to tell thee of my trading. While I have been cruising in those China waters and consorting with Chinamen, as thee puts it, I have been trading with them and I feel my time well spent, since the tea and silks I brought back to New York brought me 20,000 dollars in return. You see, good Patience, I doubt if my time could have been put to better advantage.

PATIENCE

I stand corrected, husband. Thee has done well, indeed. I could wish our gains could have come through trading with other than heathen, but thee has followed thy Guidance as thee saw it, I presume, and I should be grateful.

BURNELL

Thee should, by gad, thee should. Thee and Dorcas may have all of the best from now on. Feng Tse An and I have access to all the best markets. I can't compete with the Clipper Ships, not by a long shot, but I can bring enough goods and fast enough to make a good trade. Next voyage I shall do even better. Yes, there'll be no need to worry in our old age now, Patience. Whatever thee says about me, thee won't be able to say I haven't been a good provider. Not by a damn sight.

(Patience cringes)

DORCAS

(Calls off stage.) Father--mother--look at me! (Enters radiant in the chinese robe, wearing the headdress and jewels.)

PATIENCE

(Catches her breath and looks away.) Dorcas! What vanity!
What vain trappings.

BURNELL

Bless me, child, but thee does make a picture!

DORCAS

Oh, father, I never was so happy. I never felt anything so
soft as this robe (she hugs it to her).

BURNELL

It suits thee- I don't know why, but it does, somehow. So
thee really likes it?

DORCAS

Like it! Oh, I wish I could wear bright, happy clothes like
this all the time!

BURNELL

Does thee really feel that way about it, child? Does thee
think thee'd like to go over there to that far away place--
away from all thy friends-- and make thy home?

DORCAS

Oh, yes, - Are we going to live there someday.

BURNELL

Well, I did think of settling down there, when I left the sea--
yes, that has occurred to me often.

PATIENCE

To die and be buried in a foreign land?

BURNELL

Hadn't thought about that part of it, but why not! Same old
worms to eat us over there! But in the meantime let's think

of pleasanter matters, I hadn't figured to come right out with this as soon as I landed but - well - since the subject has come up, here's the gist of it. Things like this are arranged by the families over there in the Orient, and sometimes they turn out better than they do over here. Now, it's like this. Feng Tse An has a son - his eldest - as fine a lad as I have known - well - we've talked it over a good deal - Feng and I - and the thought that our families might unite - made life seem very worthwhile to both of us. So I have promised him that if you and your mother consent - I would bring you back on my next voyage to ^Wed his boy.

DORCAS

(Awed) Oh, father!

PATIENCE

(Stiffening) Thee has what?

BURNELL

(still not looking at her.) I have pledged my word that I would bring Dorcas back to Canton with me, that is, if she and thee are willing.

PATIENCE

Adam Burnell, thee would marry thy daughter to a heathen?

BURNELL

It is not such a terrible thing, this being a heathen, as thee calls it. They have their religion, they worship their gods - they may not be the same as ours but to them they mean as much. Their family life is as carefully guarded as ours. They are even more kind and thoughtful of one another than many of our people. They seem to lead a happy, contented worthwhile life. I see no reason to -

PATIENCE

(With rising wrath) Thee would let the child of thy flesh give herself to a yellow man?

BURNELL

I can't see as his colour makes any difference. As I said, he's as fine and up-standing a young fellow as I've seen, and I've seen a lot. Fine brain. He'll carry on his father's great trading business, someday. Why, consarn it, wife, you don't know what you're talking about to go on that way. Why this boy's father is one of the wealthiest, best educated men in all China; He's a Mandarin. That's like being a Prince in Europe. His European friends are mostly princes and such like. How he happened to take a liking to me I never have been able to make out, but he has and as I've told your we've sworn to an undying friendship. Why Dorcas would never want for anything- she'd be treated like a little princess-- servants everywhere-- she'd be--

PATIENCE

(Breathing in, her voice rising.) Thee is daft, man, to lure our child with such worldly talk. Thee must be hypnotized by these heathen. Thee must have lost thy soul as well as thy mind.

DORCAS

Mother, please--

PATIENCE

Princess-- servants! Why does thee know what kind of a life our child would lead? -I'll tell thee! A life of misery, that's

what! She might have a day or even a month of carnal joy-- but after that--what? She wouldn't be of their race-- she'd be an outcast there as well as here. She couldn't come back here-- nobody would have anything to do with her--and what of the fruit of this union--what of the children? They'd be outcasts all their lives! Half white and half yellow! No, I'd rather see our child dead than married to any heathen Chinese--no matter how rich or how important¹⁰ dead, I say! Curse thee--Adam Burnell for thy actions-- curse thee!

(Her voice has risen until she almost shrieks) (She realizes what she has said and pulls herself together and sits, ^{slowly} folding her hands and bowing her head.) God forgive me! I have blasphemed. Help me, Adam, help me, Dorcus, my temper has made me sin--Pray that I may be forgiven. (The other two sit with bowed heads for about a minute. Then Burnell slowly rises and crosses to her.)

BURNELL

Patience, thee will be forgiven thy blasphemy, ¹¹ thee is right, I had lost sight of many things. My great regard for my friend-- my fondness for his people and their ways had made me forget how far apart we are. Forgive me. This is the last you will ever hear on this matter.

(Dorcus turns to father, then to mother, finally sits with head bowed.)

CURTAIN

"THE CHINA TRADE"

ACT II.

"The China Trade"

Act II.

The time is five years later.

The scene is the same as Act I.

(The room has not been changed but it has a more austere look about it than ever. None of the Chinese ornaments are in evidence. But the large portrait of the Mandarin Feng Tse An hangs on the back wall, (in a niche back-wall of fireplace). It seems to dominate the room. Outside it is gray and windy, with snow on the ground. Inside, there is a stove set up in the fireplace and the two "Boston" rockers are on each side. Patience sits knitting in the rocker at the Right and Miriam Joy at the left is sewing. They both wear the Quaker garb, with cap and apron.)

MIRIAM

(Speaking so fast she almost trips over her own tongue)

I didn't tell Reuben I would come to see thee about this matter. I don't like to interfere. But we talked it over and I know he admires Dorcas more than any of the other Town girls, and they have all set their caps for him. Why the way Abigail Macy went on in Meeting last First-Day was a scandal.

PATIENCE

Abigail is somewhat light-headed when it comes to the young men. 'Twill do her no good, though, to eye them, if they haven't a mind.

MIRIAM

Well, Reuben has a mind for Dorcas, of that I'm certain. So

I've persuaded him he best lose no time and to come this very day to sit with her. She does little to encourage a man I've noted, so I thought if I let thee know of Reuben's intentions thee might set Dorcas's mind in the right way of thinking so's she'd not let him slip through her fingers.

PATIENCE

I see.

Miriam

Reuben is not the kind to be trifled with. But then, too, I'm afeared he might be discouraged easily and it's time he should be wed. To be sure, Dorcas will have no fortune, since neither the Captain nor his vessel has ever returned. But she is the most likely girl in Town, I tell Reuben. The kind to help a man get on, and with her teaching she could always take up the slack in the lean months. Oh yes, I tell Reuben he can do no better.

PATIENCE

But thee has not interfered, of course? Well 'tis true enough Dorcas is getting on and should be wed. For one thing it would take her mind from forever grieving for her father.

MIRIAM

Thee's never heard, has thee, what happened to the Captain nor his vessel? Dear me, and I did want so much to have another consignment of tea. That first lot I got from him was some of the best we've ever had in the shop, and then, he never came back. The way we never know who's going to return, nor when, is a caution. / Thee has heard about Molly?

PATIENCE

Who may she be?

MIRIAM

One of those Gardners from the South end, thee knows; the wife of the second-mate on thy husband's vessel? Well, she's given up waiting for Nathaniel and is going to marry Obed Hussey. I suppose after five years, - and if the Elders consent. - But some do say "The Falcon" had been "Spoke" in China waters this past year and the Captain had said he'd never return. But that shouldn't keep the crew from returning, if they'd a mind to, should it?

PATIENCE

I do know these tales about Captain Burnell and his vessel are unfounded. Many a ship has gone down with all hands aboard.

MIRIAM

To be sure! Of course, it's natural folks would talk, the way the Captain used to go on about those Chinamen, and bringing back that portrait, - I see thee still has it hanging there. - Well, whatever may have happened it's been hard on thee and Dorcas.

PATIENCE

The child has grieved, un-naturally. Lately she has become so restless she has notion^s of going off, to the Mainland, to teach in foreign parts. She'd starve - with no friends and no money.

MIRIAM

What she needs is to wed and settle down. And Reuben should suit her admirably. He's industrious and quiet and God-fearing.

PATIENCE

She could do no better. Yes, I will speak to her.

MIRIAM

There- that's the end of that row, (She puts up her knitting) I'll scurry along so Reuben won't find me here, it would never do for him to think I was interfering.

(Abigail calls from Right entrance as she opens door in vestibule)

ABIGAIL MACY

May I come in?

PATIENCE

Yes, yes, Abigail.

ABIGAIL

Hasn't Dorcas come home yet?- (She has come into room)

Oh, how-de-do Friend Joy, I've just been to thy shop for a pound of sugar. (With a coy smile) And how is Reuben today?

MIRIAM

As well as usual, Abigail. But thee should know, as thee must have seen him at the shop.

ABIGAIL

Oh, I did; but he was busy waiting on other customers and it would have been too bold to ask him how he felt.

MIRIAM

(Sniffs)

No doubt the looks thee gave him were not bold either?! - Good day to thee. Good day Friend Burnell.

(Patience follows Miriam to vestibule)

I feel we have followed our guidance and what happens will be the Lord's will.

PATIENCE

We can but hope for the best.

ABIGAIL

(As she takes off her shawl and bonnet and puts them on the chair- Right. She speaks to herself)

I wonder what she meant?

(She takes her sewing and sits in chair left of stove)
(Patience comes back into room and crosses to her chair)

PATIENCE

If thee brings thy work to thy eyes, Abigail, instead of thy eyes to the work, thee will not grow round-shouldered.

ABIGAIL

(Sitting up stiffly) Yes, Friend Burnell. My, I wish I could stand as straight as Dorcas. Everyone admires her at Meeting. She and Reuben made a handsome couple as they walked from Meeting last First-Day, didn't thee think so?

PATIENCE

Thee knows the motto, Abigail, "Handsome is as handsome does".

ABIGAIL

It's being said in Town that Reuben admires Dorcas, - that it is likely they will walk out together soon.

PATIENCE

The town is ahead of itself with such gossip.

Abigail

Mother says there is no other desirable man left in Town, and we can't all marry him. But if it isn't to be Dorcas, whom does thee think Reuben will choose?

PATIENCE

Time will tell whom Reuben Chooses.

ABIGAIL

Oh dear, Dorcas always tells me everything but I haven't had a good gam with her for ever so long. I wish she'd come soon.

PATIENCE

I doubt if Dorcas will have any time for gamming to-day. And isn't it time for thy Mother's medicine, Abigail?

ABIGAIL

My sakes! I was near to forgetting.

PATIENCE

If thee will go the back way thee may pick up a bowl of custard on the kitchen table for thy mother.

(Abigail rises quickly and starts to cross for shawl, catches sight of portrait, stops and stares at it)

What has come over thee, Abigail?

ABIGAIL

That portrait- it always frightens me a little. The eyes seem to follow me.

PATIENCE

'Tis the way of most portraits, I'M told.

ABIGAIL

Maybe, but when it's a foreign looking man like that it seems worse. (She is putting on her bonnet and shawl)

Thank thee, Friend Burnell, for the custard. (She crosses to door-up Right) Please tell Dorcas I came. (She pokes her head in door again) Please say I have something to tell her. I mean, I want her to tell me something- That is- anyway I can't wait to see her.

PATIENCE

Yes, yes, Abigail. (Abigail has gone. Patience gets up and crosses to window Left and looks out. As she crosses back to

her chair she glances at portrait and shows her animosity to it)

(There is the sound of a door banged outside)

PATIENCE

(After a pause calls out) Thee is home late, Dorcas.

DORCAS

(From hall as she hangs up her things) I had to keep some of my scholars in after school. ^{And} ~~The~~ wind was so strong coming up Main St., I couldn't make headway against it.

(She comes into room and crosses to stove spreading her hands to warm them. She has brought in some books and a pencil which she places on chair near stove.)

PATIENCE

'Tis but a tempest. It will blow itself out by morning.

DORCAS

But will the winter never end! To think, there are some lands where the sun shines all the year round!

PATIENCE

And where it is not enough to cook one's brains!

DORCAS

Oh no, where it is warm enough to thaw out one's feelings, and be happy in just living.

PATIENCE

If thee means sensual and immoral, 'tis likely enough that.

DORCAS

But mother, from what I've read of the native people in the tropics their ways may be primitive, but they are clean and wholesome.

PATIENCE

How like thy father!

DORCAS

Father always said what is right for us is not right for them - and the other way about, too, I suppose. Only - it would be

simpler to live where the wind didn't blow cold most of the time and all one's feelings weren't frozen inside. (She looks at Picture) Feng would understand what I mean.

PATIENCE

Thee cannot know what a Chinaman would understand!

DORCAS

The Translations of Confuscious's sayings that father left is full of understanding and wisdom.

PATIENCE

Wisdom? Wickedness! It is that picture that makes thee dwell in lands where wickedness flourishes. It's not right that any image so strange to our way of thinking, should be hanging there with its mocking face. When the Spring cleaning is done this year, I shall certainly have it removed to the attic.

DORCAS

Mother, how can thee talk that way! (She closes the book she has been looking over quickly and crossed to the window, tense.)

Where in the Book of Discipline would thee find justification for refusing father's last request? Though his body may be lying at the bottom of the sea, I'm certain he would know!

PATIENCE

So be it. But when the time comes for thee to have a home of thy own thee may have this house with the picture of that creature that goes with it, I shall move elsewhere.

DORCAS

Let us speak no more of this matter! Ever! (She beats her fist in her hand; trying to control her temper.)

PATIENCE

Watching her closely) Dorcas, thee must pray for guidance that thee may control thy temper at all times and not have the cross

to bear that I have had all my life.

DORCAS

(Turning sympathetically) I know, mother, and I'm sorry, but I've been out of sorts all day. The children mucked me a good deal. Each one seemed to try to out-do the other in mischief.

PATIENCE

Thee has not a firm enough hand with them. If thee wishes to be a teacher of the young thee must first of all be a disciplinarian. But thee will learn better when thee has young ones of thine own.

DORCAS

(Is sitting again with her book) And how is that to be?

PATIENCE

Thee will marry yet.

DORCAS

Why must I?

PATIENCE

It is the Lord's will. "He works in mysterious ways his wonders to perform". (Trying to be casual) I presume likely thee did not come through the Square on thy way home today. If thee had Reuben Joy might have seen thee and walked home with thee.

DORCAS

(Looking up quickly) Why would thee think that? He did hail me, but the wind was blowing me about so I didn't stop.

PATIENCE

I've had a visit from his Mother. She thinks it likely he's coming this day to pay his respects to thee.

DORCAS

Whatever for? Thee doesn't mean- ? ! (She laughs out loud)

PATIENCE

I do. And thee has no right to laugh in that worldly fashion at

a young man's intentions.

DORCAS

Thee is right, Mother, I shouldn't laugh. But, if he does come, it will be hard going to keep my face straight.

PATIENCE

Dorcas Burnell, thee is wicked to go on so! Thee can have nothing against young Reuben.

DORCAS

No, I can have nothing against him, I presume likely, He cannot be blamed for being stupid.

PATIENCE

When a woman knows she is more clever than a man she can keep the upper hand. Be advised, that makes up for a great deal in married life.

(She has risen and is looking out of the window, Left)

Here comes someone up the street. Yes, I believe it is Reuben coming here. He's headed this way, certainly.- But, no, 'tis a stranger, and not Reuben at all.

(Goes back to her chair)

A peddler from the Mainland, I presume likely. Don't let him come in, Dorcas. We want nothing. (Knock on door)

DORCAS

But he may have shawls and jewelry that the world's people wear. We could look at them.

PATIENCE

Likely only a Tinker; come on the boat to-day to mend the Town's pots and pans.

(There has been a loud knock on the outside door)

(Dorcas has gone to vestibule- Patience returns to her knitting)

DORCAS

(After a pause, from outside)

Yes, this the home of Captain Adam Burnell, but (Pause)

Yes, I am his daughter. My mother is inside. Please come this way. (Dorcas enters followed by Nathaniel Gardner)

This is my mother.

GARDNER

(Stands in doorway looking at Patience)

How-de-do, Mrs. Burnell. / Likely you'll not be remembering me. We only met once since I've been at sea.

PATIENCE

Thee has the look of a Gardner, but I don't recollect whose son thee is.

GARDNER

Tom Gardner's son, Nathaniel. 2nd Mate on "The Falcon".

PATIENCE

"The Falcon"!

DORCAS

Where is father?

GARDNER

(Feeling very awkward and uncomfortable)

Captain Burnell commissioned me to bring back his vessel to this port and turn it over to thee.

PATIENCE

"The Falcon" then has returned?

DORCAS

But where is father?

PATIENCE

The Captain does not return?

GARDNER

Nor the vessel, neither.

DORCAS

But-

GARDNER

It's a long tale I have to tell thee. I came to do it- so best get it over and be quick about it.

(Patience indicates chair- he sits in chair, down Right)

When the Captain lay dying, with the First Mate gone, he put me in charge of "The Falcon."

DORCAS

Father - dead?

PATIENCE

Dorcas, keep hold on thyself.

GARDNER

(Not looking at either of the women)

We was in the Mandarin's Palace in Canton. - The vessel, she lay in the big basin at the mouth of the Pearl River, a few miles away. They'd taken the Captain up the river in one of them sampans and we'd carried him ashore.

DORCAS

What was the matter? How had father become ill?

GARDNER

Open wound, ever since we'd had a run-in with some natives on one of the Samoas. Went ashore for water. They came on sudden-like, with knives. We got away by the skin of our teeth. The

Captain- he was in the last boat and they shot some of their poisoned arrows- got him in the shoulder- got the Mate too- he died the next day. The Captain figured he could pull through. We beat on up the China sea, and at last hove to in the Pearl River. Then, like I say, we got him ashore. He was all-fired weak by that time, and them Chinamen treated him fine, they did, like he was one of their own. He had every care, but he just wasted away, and that Mandarin, he was all broke up. The Captain's last word's was to me;- "Consarn it, 'Thaniel, you're young but you be the Master of "The Falcon" now. Take her back to Nantucket and hand her over to Mrs. Burnell. Tell them I'd be aboard too if I could have lived to get there. Good luck to you"- That's just how he put it.

(Dorcas tries to hold back her quiet sobs)

PATIENCE

(Rises and crosses to Dorcas)

Dorcas- remember the reading of the Discipline. There is to be no grief over death. It is but another beginning.

GARDNER

And you should have seen the buriel they give him, Miss, It would have done your heart good. Processions and everything. And they layed him away in their private burying ground where there's images and prayer houses and the Mandarin said he would be buried next to him.

(Dorcas looks up at picture)

(Gardner turns and looks also)

Aye, that's the one, and It's a good likeness too.

PATIENCE

(Going back to her chair)

What of the vessel? What has thee done with her?

GARDNER

I'm coming to her Ma'rm. I got the rest of the crew to-gether and set sail for home, three years ago this October. We had good weather at first, and then half-way across the Pacific there come on such a gale as I had never seen on any sea. It blew us onto one of them coral reefs- and there she foundered. Some of the crew was drowned, the rest of us made the best of it for most a year before a vessel have to and took us aboard. That was "The Morning Star" out of New Bedford. She was headed for China so we sailed back again, to HongKong, this time. After a year on the "Japan Grounds" for whales we rounded the Horn and landed with our cargo two days ago.

PATIENCE

So, "The Falcon" foundered and all our fortunes with it.

GARDNER

I did the best I knew how ma'rm; but I don't think anyone could have out-riden that gale, not even the Captain himself; and there's others that will bear me out.

DORGAS

Oh, Mr. Gardner, we know thee did thy best, and we feel sorry for thee too- that thee has had so much misfortune.

PATIENCE

Yes, misfortune all around. (Pause) Has thee been yet to thy home, Nathaniel?

GARDNER

(He looks away- speaks evenly, as before)

I'll not be going to my home. I heard in New Bedford she's got another. I'd not have come to the Island at all but I had promised the Captain I'd bring back the vessel. Well, I couldn't

promise

do that- but I had to come tell you, even so.

DORCAS

It may be if thee were to go to thy home it would be different.
Five years is a long time to wait, with no word.

GARDNER

I've known some to wait longer.- Well, I'd best be getting
down along, now. (He has risen)

PATIENCE

We are thankful for thy safe return, Nathaniel, and grateful
to thee for thy report of the vessel and of the Captain.

DORCAS

(Crosses to him)

Oh yes, Mr. Gardner, we are. And we are so grateful to thee
for looking after father and staying by him. Please come to
see us again. I feel thee will change thy mind and see thy
family after all, and I shall pray thy fortunes will mend.

GARDNER

Thank you, Miss. You look a lot like the Captain, that you do.
Good-day to thee, and to you ma'rm.

(Gardner goes) (Dorcas goes to hall door with him)

(Patience continues to sit grimly in her chair- Dorcas
comes back into room)

PATIENCE

Buried by heathen- with heathen prayers- in heathen ground.

DORCAS

Mother,- the ground is the Lord's, no matter where- thee knows
that. But, I know, thee would have preferred to think of his
body at the bottom of the sea, food for sharks, than to know
he was cared for tenderly, and prayed over by sincere hearts,

though they were heathen, as you call them- I'm glad-glad,
since it had to be, to know he was with his friend.

(To picture) Oh, Feng, thank thee, thank thee for taking care
of my father.

PATIENCE

(Rises and starts to pace the floor restlessly)

Now there ^{is} no longer any likelihood even of the vessel's return
more than ever, I say, thee must make the most of any
opportunity with Reuben Joy.

DORCAS

(Still gazing at the portrait has been lost in thought)

Reuben Joy? What of him?

PATIENCE

Has thee so soon forgotten? I just now told thee he was coming
to visit with thee this very afternoon. Thee could do much
worse than Reuben. If thee keeps thy head about thee he will
come to the point soon enough I feel certain.

DORCAS

But, mother-

PATIENCE

And thee will not be sorry in the end. There is no life for a
woman but to be wed and settle down to raising a family.

DORCAS

But I tell thee Mother, I-

PATIENCE

(Still paying no heed to her)

He will be coming any time now.

(She crosses Left for shawl in Hallway)

PATIENCE

I have a mind to step over to neighbor Macy's before dark, so I'll scud along. She's been ailing this past week.

DORCAS

(Wearily and not taken in)

But I thought you told me yesterday she had quite recovered.

PATIENCE

No- no, not altogether. Thee must have misunderstood. I'll go the back way. (She crosses to Right and gets apron from outside Right doorway)

Now put on this clean apron and straighten thy hair. That's what comes of not wearing thy cap. And remember the instructions of the Discipline and be maidenly. But also, neither must thee be discouraging. There are two times when a young man is easily discouraged;- at the beginning of a courtship, and at the end.

DORCAS

I see; at the beginning he is fearful the young woman will not consent,- and at the end he is fearful she will?!

PATIENCE

For shame, Dorcas! (She leaves quickly)

DORCAS

(Has changed her apron and is smoothing her hair)
(She turns to portrait)

Oh, father Feng, I have only thee to turn to now, now that I know father will not return,- only thee to watch over me. If she were to hide thee away I'd be lost; I'd be lost without thee.

(A loud knock from the knocker of the front door, Left)
(Dorcas, startled, looks back at Feng, puzzled)

Thee did surely look at me, then, as if thee were about to speak, - father Feng. If thee but could! - Strange what tricks the eyes can play.

(A second knock comes louder than the first)

(Dorcas goes to the door- she speaks outside)

Come in Reuben- before thee is blown in. There is ice in the wind today. (She comes into room Reuben follows standing in doorway with hat and coat still on)

REUBEN

So- thee is here, Dorcas.

DORCAS

Yes, I'm here, Reuben. Did thee not expect to find me?

REUBEN

Yes, - that is- I spied thee headed for thy home and I thought thee should be here by now, if thee had not stopped on the way.

DORCAS

Take off thy things, Reuben, and come warm thee by the fire.

(He steps into the hallway to remove coat and muffler, but not his hat. Dorcas sits by the stove, Right. She takes another look at Feng with a wry smile. Reuben enters and sits in stiff chair near door)

Come sit close to the stove, Reuben, so thee'll have some benefit from it's heat.

REUBEN

I would not care to, thank thee. If I should get too warm it would be all the colder when I stepped out again.

DORCAS

Such caution, my, my!

REUBEN

(Stiffly) Is thy mother in good health, Friend Dorcas?

DORCAS

Yes, thank thee, Reuben, and thy Mother, I hope whe is well?

REUBEN

She gets about, yes, she gets about considerable.

(There is an obvious pause)

DORCAS

I see by "The Inquirer," thee has "Boots for Gold digging for sale at thy store.

REUBEN

One must keep up with the times. New that the gold-rush is on we have to have everything to out-fit a man for the Western life. Those boots are superior to anything else on the Island and preferable to any other kind. With those boots the wearer will be sure to get one to three ounces more of the prescious gold than he would with any other kind.

DORCAS

(Decidedly amused) So thy advertisement read.

REUBEN

And it is the truth. I never make over-statements about my goods.

DORCAS

✓✓ But how can thee be sure a man can get more gold in one kind of boot than he would with any other kind. The many who have gone to the Gold fields from this Island have not yet been heard from.

REUBEN

No, and never will be, likely. 'Tis a fool's chase they've gone on. Closing up their shops and going thousands of miles after

something they don't know will still be there after they've made the trip.

DORCAS

But they will have an exciting time. And some are bound to make their fortunes.

REUBEN

They'll do no better than some of us who stay at home. "It's an ill wind" I'm doing better than ever, myself.

DORCAS

I'm glad for thee, Reuben.

REUBEN

And that brings me to what I have come about. Thee must be wondering why I have taken time from the store on a busy Monday afternoon to pay thee a visit~~y~~. Well, it's like this - I'm a man of few words and never mince matters, as the world's people say.

DORCAS

Yes, Reuben.

REUBEN

Now as I see it, I could visit with thee, and ask thee to walk out with me until thee and every one in Town would know that I had intentions. But that would waste much time. Besides, thee is not still young.

(Dorcas gives him a half surprised, half amused look)

That is - we are both getting on, to our middle twenties, when every right thinking man and woman should already be wed.

So - in plain words - Dorcas Burnell - I have come today to ask thee to stand-up-in-meeting with me. That is to say - to be my

lawful, wedded wife.

DORCAS

(surprised and abashed)

Thee has surely used many words this day, Reuben Joy, and thee has minced none of them.

REUBEN

(Not understanding)

Eh? What's that?

DORCAS

And neither will I mince matters. I realize the honor thee has paid me by asking me to share thy life and fortune- but I cannot stand-up-in-Meeting with thee, and be thy lawful wedded wife.

REUBEN

Thee cannot?- Is thee otherwise promised? I know of no one here in Town whom thee goes out with?

DORCAS

I walk out with no one.

REUBEN

Then I don't understand? If thee has a good reason why thee cannot, it is only fair to tell me.

DORCAS

The reason is, Reuben, I cannot care for thee- in that way.

REUBEN

(Blankly) What way?- Are there ways of caring that are so important as all that? Thee is a well set-up woman, I can support thee. Our Mothers are agreeable to the plan, what else can be of consideration.

(Dorcas has risen)

DORCAS

A good deal else for my part, Reuben,- I am sorry if this, shall we say, set-back in thy plans comes as a surprise, but it can't be helped.

REUBEN

(After a long pause- he has also risen)

Thy word is final?

DORCAS

(After a pause)

Yes, Reuben.

REUBEN

(Trying hard to control his hurt pride and anger)

Good-day to thee, then-

(Reuben turns quickly and goes to hall)

(Dorcas follows to inside door)

DORCAS

Good-day to thee, Reuben. God-speed. Thee will find another more worthy of thy intentions.

REUBEN

(Re-appearing in doorway)

That I cannot say. But it was thee I had chosen. Thee is certain thee'll not change thy mind? Doesn't thee think thee may regret this someday?

DORCAS

(She shakes her head)

That, I cannot say.

(He turns and goes- Door bangs outside)

(Dorcas moves to window, watches him go down the path.
Then she slowly moves to opposite to table, restlessly
she picks up a book, finally sits in chair, Right of stove,
thoughtfully peering into space. She starts to speak
softly, thinking out loud) (The daylight has begun to fade)

DORCAS

Perhaps I shouldn't have done that. Now that father'll not be coming back to take me away, perhaps I've done wrong. It may be that I should have given my body that children could have been born. Without love- without admiration, or even respect? He would have been kind, I presume likely. I could have been patient. All the rest of my life I would have had to be patient as if waiting- waiting always- for something that would never come.-- (Her voice breaks)

But- the un-born-they will always be there- heavy under my heart. It was wicked to deny them. It was wicked.

(She buries her face in her hands and sobs quietly)

FENG TSE AN

(His voice comes quietly from the portrait- or rather
from him, who is the portrait) *as Light on portrait increases)*

For the young to follow the heart is wisdom.

(It has grown quite dark in the room. Dorcas
listens to Feng's voice, not startled but
incredulous she only half turns to the picture.)

DORCAS

If I dared to believe my ears-?!

FENG

(In even tone, as before)

Courage come easily if propelled by your wish.

DORCAS

Oh- I do wish to hear thy voice- Feng Tse An, friend of my father- I do! Speak again!

(She has risen and turning to portrait has crossed nearer to where it hangs)

FENG

To think to spend one's life in patient waiting is to think to waste it.- More wicked than what you have done, would be to let your warmth of life be smothered under gray rooves- Philosopher say-"Passion holds up the bottom of the world while Genius paints its roof." This warmth of soul- this passion, is the core of living.- the brightness in the stars, the lure in music, the delight in flowers, - from which comes the inner glow that makes a full life possible. You must not put this aside- your warmth of soul and depth of understanding. You must nurture it and spread your message.- that life does not have to be lived one way only- to be lived well.

DORCAS

(Half whispers)

I will-

FENG

But keep in your mind also this thought- That because life can be hard, warmth of soul is not enough. To passion must be added wisdom and courage. Grow in your wisdom, that courage may be given you to take your stand alone and keep the foot on the chosen path.

DORCAS

(In hushed voice)

Oh Feng Tse An, Thee has given me new courage with thy wisdom.

I won't forget, I promise. I've known thee would help me,
some way, somehow, - always I have known it.

FENG

Since I have gone to my ancestors, our support will uphold you,
if you keep true to yourself.

DORCAS

I understand. -

(A door is heard closing at Right)

PATIENCE

(From outside)

Dorcas - where is thee?

(Patience comes into room)

Is thee here in the dark?

(She bustles about getting ^{candles} ~~lamps~~ lighted)

I thought I heard voices. But thee is alone, surely, for I
saw Reuben leave.

(Has ^{candles} ~~lamps~~ lit)

There, 'tis past time the ^{candles} ~~lamps~~ were lit. But I suppose thee
had thy mind on other things. Reuben did not stay so long as
I thought he would. But, I presume likely he thought it
unseemly to remain longer on the first visit. The next time
thee might set out a colation for him. That always keeps a
man on longer.

DORCAS

He will not be coming again, Mother.

PATIENCE

What is that, thee is saying?

DORCAS

It is unlikely Reuben will make more visits here.

PATIENCE

What has happened? ^{You} ~~Thee~~ could not have quarreled before ~~thee~~ ^{you} ~~has~~ even started to walk out to-gether?

DORCAS

There was no quarrel. And thee was right. Reuben came with intentions. Without any of the usual preliminaries, he asked me to stand-up-in-Meeting with him, and I told him I wouldn't. That's all that happened;- and, as thee noted, it didn't take very long.

PATIENCE

Thee doesn't mean to sit there and tell me thee has refused him?

DORCAS

Yes, Mother.

PATIENCE

Thee refused him?! The only chance thee will have from now till Doomsday?

DORCAS

(Unabashed)

There may be others - from away - someday, who can tell?!

PATIENCE

(With a look at the portrait - her anger rising)

From far away-?- If that is what thee is counting on, my fine young woman, thee must be daft! Someone from far away! Is that what all thy strange notions and dreaming ways have brought thee to? Thee will sit here in thy rocker and turn out to be an old-maid, and who will take care of thee?

DORCAS

I'll take care of myself, with my teaching. I shall study and gain more knowledge, and someday I shall have a school of my own.

PATIENCE

Indeed! And does ^{Ther}_A think to justify thy wickedness with such schemes? Well, thee needn't try for I won't be thwarted! I've had enough of thee and thy father's ways. At every turn I've been brought up short by you both.

DORCAS

No need to blame father.

PATIENCE

Ever since he and I were wed it was the same. When we stood-up-in-Meeting he was a God-fearing man, an Over-seer of Meeting and that very year he went to sea. Ever after that there was no holding him down. He and his rough ways made me cringe at first. But I prayed for guidance and I found strength to bear them finally. Then the loss of our first born-the boy who would have been as I imagined your father would be- quiet and God-fearing, as a man should be. After that I thought thee would grow up to be my comfort, and always thee has been the thorn in my side! Thy wordly ways, and thy heathen thoughts- and now this! - But I won't have it, I tell thee! I'll see Reuben myself.- I'll tell him thee was taken a-back by his haste and that thee has changed thy mind.

DORCAS

It will do no good! Thee cannot force me to stand-up-in-Meeting with anyone. Even the Elders would not agree to that!

PATIENCE

I'll have thee read-out-of-Meeting for disobedience.

DORCAS

Thee wouldn't dare to-?!

PATIENCE

Thee defies me!

(She catches sight of picture - her rage mounting)

It is that portrait that guides thee! It is the prescence of that heathen that makes thee so bold!

(She shakes Dorcas angrily)

I'll have it down! It's my house - thee defies me in my own house!

(She starts across to where picture hangs)

It is all the fault of ~~this~~ Oriental fiend! I will have it down, I say!

(Patience staggers back down the steps clinging to the stair-rail as Feng speaks)

FENG

Old woman - you may take away the frame - but you can never rid this house of my prescence. (Patience is stunned)

The seed has been sown--when the seed is sown the roots grow down and the flower flourishes. Nothing you can do can stem the flood of human warmth and sympathy that joins our peoples in the heart of this, your child. Go your gray, well-trodden ways, and be as content as you are able.

(Patience clutches her heart and staggers)

PATIENCE

(In a gasping voice)

Thee has bewitched me, heathen! thee has done it - on purpose I - I - (She slumps at foot of portrait)

(Dorcas runs to her)

DORCAS

What is it? Father Feng, what has happened?

FENG

There is an old Chinese proverb that says "to grow narrow is soon to disappear."

(Dorcas crumples by her Mother's dead body as the curtain slowly descends)

CURTAIN

"THE CHINA TRADE."

Act III.

THE CHINA TRADE

Act III

Scene 1- The same- nearly a year later.

Another winter afternoon. Room has an appearance of coziness, with table and two rockers now at Center. No stove in open fire-place-and now all of the Chinese ornaments are about.- On the mantelpiece- are vases and bowls. Also a vase or statue on Table Right, while the robe seen in first act covers chest under window at Left.

(The stage is empty when the curtain rises. After a pause Dorcas, well wrapped in winter cape and hood comes to hall, Back Right and then into room. She seems more mature, and her movements are quicker and more decisive than formerly. After placing pile of school books and copy books on table, she blows on her mittened hands and rubs them together - then looks about the room contentedly, and blows a light kiss to the portrait of Father Feng as she crosses Right and exits to the kitchen. After another pause she returns with an armful of wood and starts to build a fire when Abigail's voice is heard from the kitchen

ABIGAIL (Off-stage)

Dorcas, it's me- I mean I- don't I?

(She comes on stage with her usual flutter. She has a heavy cape around her shoulders, but wears it loosely as if she had thrown it on in a hurry over her work dress and apron)

DORCAS

Anyhow, thee is here!

ABIGAIL

I came as soon as I saw thee at thy gate because-

(She stops short and looks confused)

DORCAS

(Looking up from her task, not very concerned)

Yes ?

ABIGAIL

well, anyway, I hadn't seen thee since yesterday and Mother says now that thee's alone we must drop in everyday just to see-that

DORCAS

(Wryly, as she goes to hang up her cloak, etc.)

That I am not dead?

ABIGAIL

Oh, Dorcas - how thee goes on! And my, but it's cold in here - I'd perish if I had to stay in here long - why didn't thee have the stove put up this winter?

DORCAS

I always hated it - it was so ugly. The room will warm up in a minute, now that I have a fire going. Then I can watch the flames and dream my dreams.

(She goes to the fireplace, looking at the fire thoughtfully)

ABIGAIL

(Has gone to the window, where she keeps an eye on the street)

Dorcas, did any of the Elders, or Overseer's come to the school today?

DORCAS

No - not that I know of.

ABIGAIL

Did thee pass Elder Paddock on thy way home?

DORCAS

No - why?

ABIGAIL

I just wondered - (Looking worried) You know, Dorcas, sometimes thee tells me things, and asks me not to tell anyone - and I don't really - that is not knowingly - only -

DORCAS

Only sometimes they slip out before thee thinks, is that it?

ABIGAIL

Yes -

DORCAS

(Half amused) No harm done, I presume likely.

ABIGAIL

I am not certain- only- if harm was done, and it was because I forgot, would thee ever forgive me?

DORCAS

Of course, Abigail, don't be a goose! What have I told thee that would make so much difference whether it was repeated or not? Out with it! What's on thy mind?

ABIGAIL

(Who has been keeping an eye on the street)

Oh- here they come- I must go.

(She flutters across stage, picking up her cape)

Mother said not to stay long she- she felt a fainting spell coming on:

(She has by this time crossed to kitchen door, Right, and has disappeared)

(Dorcas watches her, slightly bewildered. She then takes off her green school apron, and puts a fresh white one on, that she takes from the hook on the kitchen door. By this time there has come a knock on the front door- but before Dorcas can get to the door, Miriam Joy stands in the hallway looking grim and prim in her bonnet and heavy shawl)

MIRIAM

I came right in as was my custom when thy mother was alive.

DORCAS

Why, of course, Friend Joy.

MIRIAM

Thee is alone as usual, I presume likely.

DORCAS

I never really feel I am alone.

(Miriam gives her a look)

MIRIAM

Thee is being visited.--- The Elder Paddock is here.

(Dorcas looks surprised and puzzled)

(Miriam has come into the room, and Elder Paddock now stands in the doorway. A stern, forbidding looking man in the plain clothes of the Friends, with broad-brimmed black felt hat which he never removes)

PADDOCK

Good day, Friend Burnell.

DORCAS

Good day to thee, Friend Paddock. Won't thee sit down?

(Miriam has removed her shawl and sat at Right of table)

PADDOCK

In time- in due time, Friend Burnell.

(He goes to chest, at Left, and glances down at bright embroidered Chinese robe- then he crosses slowly to other side of room, eyeing ornament on table. Next he sees the portrait and stands in front of it for a full second with his hands crossed behind him)

(Dorcas stands Center staring from Paddock to Miriam questioningly. Finally Paddock moves with measured step to chair, Left of table, and Dorcas sits back of table Center)

PADDOCK

Friend Burnell, thee has been advised once before.

DORCAS

Advised- Friend Paddock?

PADDOCK

That these frivolous ornaments and vain trappings (with a look at the robe) are not consistant with the plain living advocated by our leaders.-

DORCAS

(With a look at Miriam) It was brought to my attention, yes, right after my mother's death, that the gifts, from my father's friend, in far off China, were not in keeping with the rules of our Sect, but as few members of our Meeting ever come to my house, I felt there would be no harm to have these objects about.

PADDOCK

I cannot feel that is a proper excuse.

DORCAS

These bright, colorful objects are of so much comfort to me, Friend Paddock.

PADDOCK

Thee must learn to seek thy comfort elsewhere- not in material things, but in the thoughts that come in silent communication with the Lord.

DORCAS

In that, as well, to be sure, but how can a thing of beauty be deemed unholy, and by all standards these porcelains are beautiful. Thee can't deny that!

PADDOCK

Beauty, for itself alone, should not be encouraged! It is weakening. Thee must find what beauty thee needs in the simplicity of plain things.

DORCAS

(Beside herself) In the humdrum greys and monotonous browns of uncolored lives?! Shut in--shut in on all sides- by grey walls of wood-- by grey walls of water!! Oh, it is not fair to have to shut out the light in one's heart!! Our gray clothes, and our more and more strict rules are narrowing down our lives.

DORCAS

It didn't used to be so. Our grandfathers and grandmothers were bright colors and had music and cheer in their lives. We're stiffling our belief! It is not healthy. It can't last this way, You'll see!

(Paddock looks at Miriam, as much as to say she is becoming hysterical.)

MIRIAM

It is because thee is alone that thee is becoming so unnerved, Dorcas.

PADDOCK

I thought only to have to remind thee of thy duty, and thee would comply with the request willingly. Now I can see thee is letting these fancy gee-gaws become objects of worship.

DORCAS

No more than one worships the beauty of the sky and the flowers.

PADDOCK

No- as the Heathen worships gods! Thee is making these objects thy gods! To the shame of thy Mother's memory.

DORCAS

That is not true--And besides, to the Heathen, as thee calls them their gods are only symbols. They worship the goodness and beauty in all things. Why cannot we respect their religion as well as our own? Isn't that the reason our leaders came to this country? where our form of worship would at least be tolerated?

PADDOCK

(Not able to refute her argument, he takes refuge in another tact)

Thee is a woman, Friend Burnell- It is not seemly for thee to go so far beyond thyself as to question the tenants of the

Discipline, and to promote thy theories. Besides as thee is a teacher of the young, thee must curb thy desire for this thing called beauty, and lead thy thoughts into more secure ground.

DORCAS

Because I am a woman, I must hold to security when there is the whole wide world of thought and theory to explore?! It is as if thee told men to keep from wandering far afield, with the whole wide sea and land to discover and chart?!

PADDOCK

(Well out of his depth)

Be that as it may, Friend Burnell, the Elders have taken this matter under advisement, and have decided that thine absorption in Heathen decoration is an affront to the ruling of the Meeting, and that the objects must be removed.

(Dorcas bows her head trying to hold on to herself)

And thee knows well enough- Even if the decorations were not Heathen objects, they would be considered too frivolous for a sincere believer in the plain living.--

(Paddock has risen again and crossed to front of portrait, which he gazes at thoughtfully once more)

DORCAS

(Who has been watching him, looks from one to the other, frightened)

No- no! Not the portrait! Not that too!

PADDOCK

To be sure- this must go, also!

MIRIAM

Of course! Dorcas, and time it is!

DORCAS

(Almost beside herself)

But it's only a picture! The likeness of Feng Tse An, my father's friend!

PADDOCK

The face of an Oriental, a Heathen, hanging here in the home of a birthright Friend is an affront to the Meeting, of which thee is a member. Thee has had ample warning to mend thy ways. The portrait must be removed at once!!

DORCAS

(Beside herself) But it was the last wish of my father that it hang there as long as any of us were alive!

PADDOCK

And the last wish of thy mother, an overseer of the Meeting, that it be removed!-- was it not?

MIRIAM

Yes, yes, that's true enough!

PADDOCK

I understand that thee has said it was a quarrel over this very portrait that brought about thy mother's untimely death.

DORCAS

But Friend Paddock, it isn't doing anyone harm now- Thee can't ask me to remove it-- it isn't fair!!!

PADDOCK

It is harming thee, child. It is having an evil influence on thy life!!!

DORCAS

The picture of Feng Tse An, an evil influence?!

PADDOCK

Can thee deny that dark things are going on here? Can thee deny that thee talks to this picture as if it were a person - thee has been overheard to do so. Can thee deny that ~~thee~~ ~~deny that~~ thee has confided in someone that thee imagines it speaks to thee!?

(Dorcas looks quickly to where Abigail has gone out and murmurs to herself)

DORCAS

So that was it!

PADDOCK

(Going right on)

Such unheard of procedures cannot be tolerated! And since all this can only be thine imaginings, it proves conclusively the portrait is doing thee harm!

DORCAS

(As if to herself) To the contrary - But for the portrait, I could not tolerate my aloneness.

MIRIAM

There's no need for thee to be alone. Thee has only to - stand - up - in - Meeting with a right thinking member of our Sect, and this picture of a man painted in China will be forgotten. But no, as thy mother told me, thee prefers to sit here and wait for someone from that far-off land who will never come!

PADDOCK

Friend Joy is right, thee should wed, but if thee will not thee must, at least, conform to the ruling of the Elders, and remove these foreign objects, without further delay.

DORCAS

(After a long pause) I'm sorry, Elder Paddock, but that I cannot do.

PADDOCK

What? Thee defies us? Thee refuses?

DORCAS

Yes, because I do not believe the ruling is fair or just! These foreign objects, as thee calls them, have been only a good influence for me-- not evil-. Thee only thinks they are evil because they are strange to thee. The Orientals are not wicked because they do not believe as we do-- No-- I will not be a party to such intolerance- no matter if I have to defy the whole Meeting!

PADDOCK

In thy defiance is thee willing to face the consequences of being read-out-of-Meeting?

DORCAS

Yes, even that.

MIRIAM

As thy father before thee!

PADDOCK

ST Thee realizes what that means--thee severs the ties of thy youth The right thinking members of the Meeting will have nothing to do with thee.

DORCAS

Yes.

PADDOCK

And thee will no longer be allowed to go on with thy teaching!

DORCAS

(Quickly--in consternation) No-no not that surely?

PADDOCK

Most certainly.

DORCAS

But I am a good teacher--thee has said so thyself, Friend Paddock, and so have the other Elders. And I have never led my pupils astray with my wayward thoughts.- They are my own. Although I can live in my heart, only as I feel. Still, it can do no harm to the little ones, whom I cherish and understand so well! Thee would not keep me from them?

PADDOCK

Even so- It would have to be.

(After a pause)

We will sit in silence now-- Thee must listen for thy guidance- before thee gives thy final answer.

(They all sit with heads bent)

(After a silent pause-Feng speaks slowly and softly-only Dorcas shows any indication that she hears)

FENG TSE AN

Be thee steadfast- even as Thy Father in Heaven is steadfast.

DORCAS

(To herself, murmurs)

The Bible- Thee is quoting the Bible, Father Feng--

FENG TSE AN

True philosophy is the same everywhere.

DORCAS

Oh, if they could only understand--

(After another pause, Paddock and Miriam lift their heads)

PADDOCK

And what is thy answer, now? , Friend Burnell.

DORCAS

It is the same.

PADDOCK

So be it.

(He has spoken slowly--he now rises slowly, but with precision, and walks to doorway and leaves without stopping again, or looking behind him. Miriam follows him to the door--then turns)

MIRIAM

Thee has made a mistake, Dorcas. Thee will have no friends--no occupation--no money. Thee would have done better to weigh thy words, and give thyself time to change thy mind.

(She goes)

(Dorcas stands for a second--clutching her hands to the back of the chair--looking about--feeling how alone she is--and for a second thinking maybe Miriam was right--then she moves swiftly to chest, where she takes the robe in her hands and looks at it fondly)

FENG TSE AN

(In his even, calm voice)

You have chosen the path of courage. The gate will be opened, and the way made clear. Fear not, as you yourself have declared, you are not alone.

(Dorcas looks re-assured)

"THE CHINA TRADE"

Act III- Scene 2

Place- the same

Time- about twenty years later

The room has changed a good deal as to furniture. Some Victorian pieces- but all in good taste- Also all of the Chinese vases and curios are about. There is a small desk by window and a round table in the middle of the room with three chairs about it. There is a long chinese drapery over the portrait.

When the curtain rises Dorcas Burnell is sitting at desk. Her hair is streaked with gray but she is still an attractive woman. She wears a dress of the period- simple but in good taste. None of her spirit or joy of life have left her. Three young girls of high-school age are sitting around the center table. They are dressed plainly of the period - one wears the Quaker garb. They have open books before them and pencil and papers.

DORCAS

Mary T.- During the period of the Crusades to the near East, what was happening in the Far East- in India- and China, for instance?

MARY T

(squirms a bit and looks away) Well, they were in a high state of civilization. Their art equalled anything in Europe.

DORCAS

Had they any contact with Christianity at that time?

MARY T

No- no I don't think so.

MARY S

It wasn't until after Marco Polo went there that they did know anything about Europe, was it, Miss Burnell?

DORCAS

And when was that, Lydia?

LYDIA

In the year 1200.

DORCAS

Very well- that is all for to-day, young ladies. Next lesson we will take up the Eastern Religions- Mohamedism- Buddhism.

LYDIA

My father says I am not to study anything about the Heathen religions.

DORCAS

And is he afraid ^{there has} ~~you have~~ so little faith in your own religion, Lydia, that thee cannot learn about anoth^{er} without being corrupted?

LYDIA

He says it's no use wasting time studying about the heathen anyway, they don't count!

DORCAS

It's strange that thy father, an Elder of the Meeting should know so little of the world's history- the Oriental races could hardly be said not to count, when they comprise more than half the population of the Globe and have contributed to the growth of mankind as much as any of the races.

MARY S

How can thee have such corn-starch airs, Lydia Coleman, and believe everything thee thinks is right?

LYDIA

(Proudly) I am a birth-right Friend. I follow the Book of Discipline.

MARY T

Well, everybody doesn't have to be a Quaker!

MARY S

My father says there are so few Quakers left in Nantucket now because the Elders have become too strict.

DORCAS

Your father is right, Mary S. It has been forgotten why the Friends Society came into being. What else can it's name stand for but friendship to all mankind--Christian or otherwise?

LYDIA

But Father says since there is no Friend's school in Town now, and I have to come to school with the World's People, I must be very careful not to become corrupted.

DORCAS

And do you imagine that learning the philosophy and religion of a race of people who have produced an art such as this (she picks up vase) could be anything but an inspiration?

LYDIA

Well, friend Burnell, Mother said I could go ahead and learn about them if I wanted to- she thought it would do no harm-

DORCAS

Then I should think the choice was up to thyself, Lydia.

MARY T

When I was home at noon, my brother said he saw a "Chink" get off the boat today.

MARY S

Father said there were two of them- he couldn't see what on earth they were doing on the Island.

DORCAS

Don't you think it would be nice, girls, if you called them by their right Name? They are not "Chinks" you know. They are Chinese, just as we are Americans. And remember we must seem very strange to them. Did you ever think of that?

MARY T

Why no, but that's true, of course.

MARY S

(Getting her bonnet from chest by window-Left)

Here's one coming now, he just drove up in a surrey.

MARY T

One what, Cousin?

MARY S

One of them - He's coming up your path, Friend Burnell.

LYDIA

Who is it Mary S.? Flax aside and let me see.

MARY T

(At the window) Why it is - it's one of those Chinamen and he's at the door.

DORCAS

(WHO has been writing at her desk and paying no attention to the girls looks up quickly.)

A Chinese man at my door?

(She rises quickly, starts across, there is a knock on outside door) (Dorcas stops in her tracks) (To herself) How strange.

(She exits - left) (Girls are still at window - they hurry to table to collect their books)

MARY T

(Whispering) I wonder what it means?

MARY S

Mother says she's always been a little bit queer about anything Chinese -

LYDIA

Yes. And that's a picture of a Chinaman there on the wall.

Did you ever see it? *Mary T.*

MARY S

I did - I peeked one day -

LYDIA

Oh - thee is bold!

DORCAS

(Outside) won't you come in?

LYDIA

My sakes, he's coming in here! (They have gathered up their things and are standing ready to run out - Right)

DORCAS

Young ladies, I want you to meet Chen San, the Emmissary of The Honorable Feng Tan, the Chinese Envoy to Washington.

(He bows low)

MARY S

(After a pause as they all stand embarrassed)

How do you do?

MARY T

How do you do?

LYDIA

(Turning her head away haughtily)

How's thee?

(They scurry to the door and turn)

MARY T AND MARY S

Goodbye Miss Burnell - (To Chen) Good - day.

(They go quickly)

LYDIA

Good-bye, Friend Burnell. (She goes quickly) (Dorcas has said

"Good-day" to the girls and now stands looking at Chen not knowin

quite what to do. He stands like a graven image looking straight ahead)

DORCAS

Won't you sit down?

CHEN

Me no sit in house of friend of honorable Master.

DORCAS

I see.- Well- oh yes, you want to see the portrait to be certain it is thy Master's Father.- It's up here (She goes to portrait) I keep it covered in the day time- to prevent it from fading. (She draws the drape) There is Feng Tse An, my father's friend- and mine (She whispers the latter) It is thy Master's father, is it not?

(Chen San turns quickly- leans forward a little as if to scrutinize the portrait- then he abruptly goes to the portrait and kneels- bowing three times, then he rises and turns to Dorcas with a happy smile)

CHEN

I make ready first for Master to come here- yes?

DORCAS

(Nods) Yes.

(Chen goes to door quickly - turns to her and bows)

CHEN

"Me thank lady."

(She stands looking after him-she looks at Feng as Chen unrolls a carpet which he places on floor in front of portrait. Dorcas stares at him but says nothing) {He swiftly goes to hall again and brings in two candlesticks and burner and two prayer mats which he places in front of portrait- Candlesticks and burner on low table- the mats below. Dorcas watches him, after he finishes he goes quickly to door and bows to Dorcas).

CHEN

Master come. He will thank lady. Me go.

DORCAS

First tell me, please, - thy Master, Feng Tan- is he the eldest son of Feng Tse An-?

CHEN

My master- he first born of Old Master- he sit in Old Master's place, at head of family.

DORCAS

I see, thank you.

CHEN

Me tell Master, you say he come quick now? (Bowing)

DORCAS

Tell him he will be most welcome to come whenever he wishes.

CHEN

(Bowing again) Me go. (He exits quickly)

(Dorcas whiffls around as she did when younger- then she catches Feng's eye)

DORCAS

Oh, Father Feng, your're smiling at me- I know you are! But I must hurry- I must get this room ship- shape! An envoy- my- my!

(She starts to tidy her desk- she picks up Chinese vase with flowers on desk- straightens flowers- then darts across to sea-chest and opens it and takes out Chinese robe and slips it on)

ABIGAIL

Dorcas - Dorcas - where ^{is} ~~are~~ ^{thee} you?

DORCAS

(Half to herself) I don't quite know!

ABIGAIL

(Has come in quickly) My sakes, Dorcas, how funny you look in that thing!

DORCAS

(After a pause she looks down at robe) Yes, I presume likely I do - with my gray hair and -

ABIGAIL

And the train sticking out in back (She titters)

DORCAS

But I thought perhaps, to receive the Chinese Envoy I should have on a Chinese robe - (Taking it off reluctantly) But I suppose It won't do after all.

ABIGAIL

I did see a queer craft coming to thy door - Couldn't help wondering what he was. So that's an Envoy.. My, my, anything can happen in Nantucket - and does - but who would have thought I would look out of my window on the Ninth day of Fifth Month, while I was finishing my dinner dishes, and see a Chinese Envoy walking up the path to my neighbor's house! What has he come for? Did thee know he was coming and didn't tell me? Where is he staying? Will he be here long?

DORCAS

Now ease off - Abby - ease off - thee will trip over thy own tongue if I misstay not. That was not the Envoy in the first place - but his Emmissary. The Envoy is coming here soon this afternoon.

ABIGAIL

(Eagerly) But-

DORCAS

Now wait- while I tell thee all I know. He sent his Emmissary ahead to find out if this was the house of Captain Burnell, and if his father's portrait still hung on our walls. He has come from Washington to pay his respects to the portrait and to the family of his father's friend.

ABIGAIL

All the way from Washington just to pay a call- but

DORCAS

Yes, the Emissory said he is staying at Sherburne House.

ABIGAIL

(Spies the candles and prayer mats, scurries to the portrait)

Now what ever is all this? Carpet in front of the portrait? They needn't think thy floors are dusty! (Fingering candlesticks) But where did these things come from? I never saw them before.

DORCAS

The Emmissary brought them with him- The worship of the ancestors is part of the Chinese Religion.

ABIGAIL

Worship one's father?

DORCAS

Yes, after he is dead.--It breeds great respect for one's family. It also draws the family closer together and gives it more influence and power.

ABIGAIL

I've never been able to see how thee could understand all these

strange customs and make them seem not queer. And, the portrait I haven't seen it in a long time. It still looks the same.

DORCAS

~~Why yes~~ ^{Of course}, why not?

ABIGAIL

So it's his son that is coming here? His son? Why Dorcas - that's the one -? That is - why of course it must be the same - You know the one you told me about that time when your Mother was taken ill and you told me about everything that happened?

DORCAS

The time you broke your promise not to tell anyone?

ABIGAIL

I know, but that was so long ago and I didn't tell anyone - except maybe, just one person.

DORCAS

That's enough in this Town.

ABIGAIL

But Dorcas, don't you think he's coming here for you - to get you to wed him after all - don't you?

DORCAS

What nonsense! After all these years? (Sits at desk)

ABIGAIL

But he may have been grieving and waiting all this time. And now that he's an Envoy - you wouldn't have to live in China but in Washington - Oh, I just know he has!

DORCAS

That is absolutely absurd, Abigail Macy! (Not completely convinced in her own mind that it is absurd.)

ABIGAIL

But it isn't! He wouldn't come all the way out here from Washington just to look at a portrait.

DORCAS

But, I tell thee -

ABIGAIL

No - he's come to see what thee's like, anyway.

DORCAS

~~But he's leaving on the morning boat, how~~ could he expect to find out what I was like in ~~so short a time?~~ *just meeting me for the first time?*

ABIGAIL

Oh, thee can persuade him to stay on ~~longer~~, I know thee can!

DORCAS

Now Abigail how can thee think he could become interested in prosaic me - a schoolmarm, after the attractive and clever women he must meet in Diplomatic circles.

ABIGAIL

Oh, thee is more than a schoolmarm - and thee knows it, with a school of thy own - and looked up to by every one in Town - *and* writing papers on the Orient, that are read at Harvard.

DORCAS

And Cambridge is as near as I have ever gotten to the Orient -

ABIGAIL

And hasn't thee waited all these years for someone like this - ? everyone says thee has - If thee did not want someone from away, someone important, thee would most certainly have taken Reuben Joy years ago.

DORCAS

(Smiling) But Reuben has been walking out with thee, Abigail, for fifteen years -

ABIGAIL

And the reason he has not come to the point with me is because he still cares for thee.

DORCAS

It isn't that he still cares, it's that he set his mind on having me and I refused him--he'll have no other-- some men are like that--'tis a pity.

ABIGAIL

And maybe it's better this way. Reuben would be none too easy to get along with. And now this Envoy has come for thee, Dorcas, why thee is to have thy chance-- after all I know thee is - and I'm glad for thee! (Sudden change) But Dorcas - I forgot - he's Chinese - Would you really marry anyone like that - you know, an Oriental, would you?

DORCAS

(After a pause) If I found I really loved him, and he asked me, yes, I would.

ABIGAIL

(Tearfully) Well, I don't know whether I hope he does or not, after all. Anyway, I know I don't want you to go away from the Island and live in China, or even Washington!

DORCAS

(Has been looking out window) Hush - Abigail - hush! Here they come now. They've just driven up in old Mr. Gardner's surrey.

ABIGAIL

Oh- I must flax- I don't want to be caught.

(Trying hard to see over Dorcas' shoulder)

I'll see what he looks like from my kitchen window- and you'll tell me all about him- won't you? Remember everything he says- so you can tell me- won't you?

(She gives her a little hug and scurries across Right and Out) (Knock on door) (Dorcas clutches at her dress- pauses for a second and then goes to vestibule)

DORCAS (Outside)

Won't you come in.

(She backs into the room and crosses center)

(After a pause Chen comes in swiftly)

CHEN

(Bows to Dorcas, then straightens and announces)

The Honorable Feng Tan, Head of the house of Feng, Envoy Extraordinary to the United States government.

(Feng Tan enters slowly- he pauses for a moment at the threshold taking in everything and then he slowly comes down Left and bows low to Dorcas.)

DORCAS

(After watching him closely)

How does thee do. (She crosses a little way to him)

It is a pleasure to meet thee- and to welcome thee to my home and the ~~the~~ Island of Nantucket.

FENG TAN

I am honored by your welcome- It gives me great satisfaction

to be in the home of the friend of my father, and to have this opportunity to pay respects to his memory. You will excuse us, I hope, while we proceed with our ceremony.

DORCAS

Why yes, to be sure. Shall I, that is, would you like to have the room to yourselves?

FENG TAN

It is not necessary. You may remain if you so desire.

DORCAS

(Softly) Thank thee. (She crosses Left to window and stands watching during the next proceeding.)

(Chen goes quickly to steps-lights candles and incense. After he steps to one side. Then Feng Tan walks slowly to the prayer mat and kneels bowing three times. Chen follows, kneeling on mat in back of him and to one side. Then Feng Tan says softly a Chinese prayer.- He bows again to portrait-Chen does it after him. Feng Tan rises slowly and moves right center. Chen swiftly puts out candles-picks them up-also incense jar-and leaves quickly.) Feng Tan has been looking straight ahead. Dorcas also has turned her head away)

FENG TAN

It may seem strange to you, this custome of our people.

DORCAS

Not so strange, and somewhat comforting. I feel the room has been blessed.

FENG TAN

It may also be of comfort to you then, to know that such prayers are said daily at the graves of your honored father, and my honored father, where they lie with the ancestors of my family.

DORCAS

It does----All these many years! Oh it does comfort me- But

won't thee sit down, Feng Tan?

(He bows low and sits Left of Table)

(After another awkward pause)

DORCAS

Thee had a comfortable journey from Washington, I trust?

FENG TAN

(still looking straight ahead) It is always interesting to see new places.

DORCAS

(straightening) Oh, yes, isn't it! (Another pause) Thee has been long in Washington, I presume?

FENG TAN

Only long enough to present my credentials. I came here at once.

DORCAS

(Eagerly) Oh, really!

FENG TAN

It would have been my father's wish.

DORCAS

(Taken-a-back) I see, well, Now that thee is here I hope thee will plan to remain long enough to allow us to extend to thee the hospitality of our Island.

FENG TAN

I regret, my immediate return is unavoidable.

DORCAS

But after such a long journey-

FENG TAN

I leave by the morning boat.

DORCAS

Will thee, then, stay on here this evening and let me set out a small colation, and send word to some of my friends?

FENG TAN

(With a twinkle in his eye) If you will excuse me? I crossed the wide Pacific Ocean in a large ship and never became accustomed to the motion of the sea- Today I cross what seems to be as wide an expanse of the Atlantic Ocean in a very small ship and in consequence, ~~my~~ my head does not know what my feet will do. You understand, I hope?

(he smiles broadly)

DORCAS

(Smiling back at him) I am sorry, but, I understand.

FENG TAN

It is gratifying to find so many of the works of art of my country here in your home. It makes my own home seem closer.

DORCAS

They are my most treasured possessions. All are gifts from thy father, and, I believe, from thyself, many years ago- Thee may not remember.

FENG TAN

I remember- and has the portrait of my honorable father been hanging upon these walls in Nantucket since it was brought from Canton in your father's vessel?

DORCAS

Oh, yes, it has. It has never been removed.

FENG TAN

To know that my father's wish has been carried out gives me

great satisfaction. And thy father's portrait- it remains always in a place of honor under our roof in Canton.

DORCAS

(Brightly) Oh, it makes me happy to know that!

FENG TAN

That a portrait hung on the walls of a dwelling on the other side of the Pacific Ocean should gladden the heart of a lady on a small Island in the Atlantic Ocean is one of the fine threads of thought that are slowly weaving the peoples of the earth together, and lifts the human race above the level of the common impulse.

DORCAS

Thee sounds to be as much of a philosopher as thy father.

FENG TAN

(Slightly surprised, looks at her for a second)

You know of my father's philosophy?

DORCAS

(Forgetting for a moment it is only a portrait that speaks)

Oh, yes, I know thy father well. That is, I remember much my father told me of him.

FENG TAN

But your father went to his ancestors many years ago.

DORCAS

I have not wanted to forget. (She looks over at the portrait)

(He does also) (There is an awkward pause)

Will thee like living in Washington? So far away from thy own land?

FENG TAN

My duties will be interesting- and it will be a privilege to serve my own country and yours. But I will not enjoy being so long away from my family.

DORCAS

Thou has many brothers and sisters? I have forgotten.

FENG TAN

Four brothers- two sisters, many neices and nephews, and my own wife and off-spring.

DORCAS

(After she has taken it in. Speaks slowly) Tell me of thy wife and offspring.

FENG TAN

My wife has honored me with one boy and two girls. She did not accompany me to this country. The ways of the Occident are so strange to her that she would not be content, and besides, my children must not so soon leave their native land.

DORCAS

'Tis a pity who would not feel at home here. You do find many differences, don't you? Not only in customs- but in ways of thought? The two races are still very far apart, I fear.

FENG TAN

There is still much to be learned on both sides. Our race needs to learn to understand- your race needs to learn tolerance--it will come.

DORCAS

Oh yes, it must. We must all work to that end.

FENG TAN

It will take time- much time- and patient understanding on

the part of many. We have much in common--our feelings for justice- our sense of humor. Much heart-warming thought on both sides can be bound closer by the slender but tenacious cord of humor.

DORCAS

How true!

FENG TAN

The union of the two races will come about by exchange of thought rather than by inter-marriage. It would be a pity for either race to squander its individuality by too much crossing of the breed. When understanding comes, the bond of friendship can be even closer than blood ties. The father of your family and the father of my family, because of their great friendship, thought to bind our families still closer by marriage. It would have been a mistake. The normal stipend of human contentment would have been greatly strained. It was as well it did not come about. Though the disappointment to them was great.

DORCAS

(Deep in thought) Yes, it was as well.

FENG TAN

(Rises and crosses to window)

The dark comes- a wise traveller finds his own roof before sundown.

DORCAS

(Arouses herself) But if you are not to come again-We shall meet no more.

FENG TAN

One cannot say ahead, one is not to meet again, nor when there shall be a meeting, nor when.

DORCAS

(Looks over at Feng's picture)

No- that is true, isn't it?

(He crosses to door and taps his hand with his fan. Chen appears at once with two boxes-one large, one small) (He leaves at once)

FENG TAN

Allow me before leaving to present to the family of Captain Burnell, this gift from the family of Feng Tse An.

(They meet at center)

DORCAS

(Taking box and putting it on table)

Thee is most kind.

FENG TAN

(He hands her the second box)

And this- this is the gift held these many years for the bride-
who-never came. Will you be so kind as to see that she receives it-
It is an older sister perhaps?

DORCAS

(Slowly and thoughtfully) I have no sister.

(She takes the box, he looks at her more closely and then turns away)

FENG TAN

I see.

(Pause) (She has turned away and has opened the lid of the box)

DORCAS ~~white jade-~~ (She turns to him as if handing the box back)

Oh, this is too precious a gift-I-

FENG TAN

(Firmly) It was my father's wish.

(She looks slowly at Feng and holds the box close to her)

(While she is standing there, Feng Tan bows to her- then to
the portrait and then he leaves quickly)

FENG TSE AN

(After a pause) The circle is completed. Your heart has been freed.
Then the heart is freed, and one starts on a new circle the
circumference widens.

DORCAS

(As her face lights up with understanding)

es, yes!

CURTAIN